

Landscape Ordinance Frequently Asked Questions – Residential Developments

What is the purpose of the Water Conservation in Landscaping Ordinance?

The ordinance assigns an outdoor water budget to new construction. This budget is the maximum amount of water that can be used outside on the property for the year. The ordinance also requires that an applicant for a residential development prepare a Landscape Documentation Package that must be approved by the County to ensure that the planned water use does not exceed the budget.

Does this ordinance apply to all of San Diego County?

Each of the 18 cities and the unincorporated County are required by State law to adopt a water efficient landscape ordinance. The County has updated its existing ordinance to comply with State law.

What is a water budget or Outdoor Water Use Authorization?

The State has provided a calculation to determine the maximum amount of water allowed for irrigating the landscape. The calculation is based on the climate, the size of the landscaped area, use of medium to low water using plants and an efficient irrigation system. The water budget assigned to your landscaped area by the County is also called an Outdoor Water Use Authorization. The Outdoor Water Use Authorization must be issued before occupancy or use of the site can occur.

The County already requires residential developments to submit landscape and irrigation plans for common use areas within the development. Is this different?

This ordinance still requires all residential development to submit a Landscape Documentation Package for common use areas. In addition, the developer will be required to obtain an Outdoor Water Use Authorization which sets a water budget for each lot on which he plans to build a home if that home is located inside the San Diego County Water Authority or inside the Borrego Water District.

How does a developer obtain an Outdoor Water Use Authorization for the individual residential lots?

Each lot that is landscaped must have a Landscape Documentation Package (LDP) prepared and approved before the building permit for that lot will be issued. The landscaping and irrigation system must be installed and certified before the Outdoor Water Use Authorization can be issued and occupancy can occur.

If the developer creates prototypes or model landscape plans from which the buyer must choose (similar to model homes), then an LDP must be prepared for each prototype. When the building permit is issued, the prototype option used must be identified. After the landscaping and irrigation are installed, a Certificate of Completion package must be submitted and certified. Once the Certificate of Completion package has been reviewed and approved, the Outdoor Water Use Authorization will be issued and occupancy will be allowed.

What if the developer does not provide any landscaping for individual lots?

If the developer builds the home but does not provide any landscaping for the lot, an Outdoor Water Use Authorization must still be issued before occupancy is allowed. The

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Outdoor Water Use Authorization is the responsibility of the person who pulls the building permit. The landscaped area used in the calculation of the water budget will be the actual size of the total area available for landscaping up to a maximum of 4,999 square feet of landscaped area. No Landscape Documentation Package is required for the lot.

It is the responsibility of the developer to inform the buyer of the purpose of the Outdoor Water Use Authorization and the amount of the authorized water budget. The developer must also inform the buyer that if the buyer plans to landscape more than 4,999 square feet, the buyer must contact the County's landscape architect at the Department of Planning and Land Use to modify the Outdoor Water Use Authorization.

What if the developer only landscapes the front yard of the individual lots?

If the front yard is irrigated through a water meter that belongs to the HOA, it would be considered part of the common area of the project. If irrigation is supplied by a meter that serves only the individual lot, it is considered part of the landscaping for the lot.

Each lot that is partially landscaped must have a Landscape Documentation Package (LDP) prepared for the portion of the total area available for landscaping that will be installed by the developer. If the developer creates prototypes or model landscape plans from which the buyer must choose (similar to model homes), then an LDP must be prepared for each prototype. When the building permit is issued, the prototype option used must be identified.

In the LDP, two different water budgets will need to be calculated. The water budget used by the Outdoor Water Use Authorization will be based on the size of the total area available for landscaping up to a maximum of 4,999 square feet of landscaped area. A secondary water budget must be determined based on the square footage of the area the developer will actually landscape. The estimated water use of the developer's landscaping must not exceed the secondary water budget. The LDP must be approved before the building permit for that lot will be issued.

After the landscaping and irrigation shown in the LDP are installed, a Certificate of Completion package must be submitted and certified. Once the Certificate of Completion package is reviewed and approved, the Outdoor Water Use Authorization will be issued and occupancy can take place.

It is the responsibility of the developer to inform the buyer of the purpose of the Outdoor Water Use Authorization and the amount of the authorized water budget. The developer must also inform the buyer that, if the buyer plans to do additional landscaping and if the total landscaped area exceeds 4,999 square feet, the buyer must contact the County's landscape architect at the Department of Planning and Land Use to modify the Outdoor Water Use Authorization.